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## **Technical Services Management**

### **Poor Condition: Procedures for Identifying and Treating Materials before Adding to the Collections**

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*Editor's Note:* Functions for preservation of library materials, which are usually separated from the unit where technical services functions are performed, focus primarily on materials already in the collection. In this article, guest columnist Marsha J. Hamilton describes how procedures were developed at the Ohio State University Libraries for technical services staff to identify materials in process that need to be considered for preservation treatment before they are added to the collection.

The problem of collection deterioration, from a technical services perspective, focuses on materials currently in process or those that will be added to the collections in the future. This article discusses a procedure for identifying and coping with poor condition titles that are in process. The goal is to make an impact on the preservation of the library's collection simply by not adding to the problem. This procedure, instituted at the Ohio State University Libraries in November 1987, is just one example of the university's commitment to the preservation of one of its most valuable resources.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Ohio State University Libraries made a major commitment to preservation of its collections in 1984 through the formation of a Preservation Office. The position of preservation officer, with a direct reporting line to the director of libraries, was created and filled. In 1985 the libraries participated in the Preservation Planning Program (PPP) with the assistance of the Association of Research Libraries, Office of Management Studies, and funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

PPP included a random sampling of 568 titles in the Main Library; this showed that approximately 21 percent of the volumes had embrittled paper, 10 percent had bindings with structural damage, and 11 percent had been mutilated or defaced.<sup>1</sup> That was the state of the collection held in 1985, but few library collections are static entities. Each year the OSU Libraries, like most research libraries, acquire a large number of noncurrent imprints and titles published overseas. Books published in the "age of poor paper" (post-1850) or in countries using poor paper stock, such as India, can be preservation problems upon receipt.

A separate informal survey was conducted to approximate the volume of pieces ordered that might be embrittled books. We examined a nonscientific sample of over 26,000 pieces, received between July 1984 and March 1986.<sup>2</sup> Approximately 2,400 pieces (9.2 percent) were published between 1850 and 1950:

1850-1872	1.6%
1873-1900	10.2%
1901-1930	77.0%
1931-1950	11.2%

In addition, approximately 10,000 gift titles are accepted by the Libraries each year, including many older titles. If we assume that 15 percent of all incoming orders, gifts, and other receipts pose an immediate preservation problem, then the need for a procedure to handle them is apparent.

By the completion of the ARL/OMS Preservation Study Team report in September 1986, an additional thirty-two library faculty and staff of the OSU Libraries' Columbus campus took an active part in the collection of data for the study. This project generated a general awareness throughout the system that led to a discussion of a more restrictive food and drink policy, distribution of disaster emergency kits, photocopying materials for the collections on archival quality paper, and more careful handling of materials by staff. It also became obvious to faculty and staff throughout technical services that many newly acquired materials, both purchases and gifts, were preservation problems upon receipt due to their physical condition when acquired. These had been added directly to the stacks without treatment, thus adding to the preservation problem.

## **IDENTIFYING ITEMS IN POOR CONDITION**

An informal study group of five faculty and staff representing divisions within the Acquisition and Cataloging Departments and the Collection Maintenance Division of the Preservation Office met to formulate procedures to identify and handle all physically problematic materials *before* adding them to the collections. This was to include all monographic and serial pieces not covered by existing damage, defective, or return policies but was not to include materials purchased for any of the special collections or rare books locations. Incoming materials were defined as all purchases, including en bloc purchases and approval materials; gifts, including large gift collections and gifts received at departmental libraries; gift and exchange titles from exchange partners (mostly overseas); some standing orders; check-in pieces; and all titles removed from backlogs or storage for processing. It is the responsibility of all individuals handling these materials at any point before labelling to identify titles in poor condition and to place them into the poor condition flow. The following is a summary of that procedure.

### **1. Identification**

Any one or combination of problems can cause a piece to be placed in the poor condition flow. These criteria and examples are given below:

#### **A. Binding not functional**

- No binding— loose photocopied sheets or leaves, any printed matter without

board, cardboard or heavy paper covers, etc.

- Damaged binding— torn spine, broken binding, cover torn, inner joint broken
- Text block detached from binding, signatures pulled out, etc.
- Deteriorated binding— leather rot, disintegrating materials, etc.

**B. Brittle paper**

- Paper crumbling or missing pieces
- Does not pass brittle paper test entailing gently folding the lower corner of a page in the center of the book four times (if paper breaks off after two double folds, it is considered brittle)

**C. Mutilated**

- Text or illustrations cut out or missing
- Text unreadable due to defacement with ink or markers
- Text chewed by animals, run over by car, etc.

**D. Environment damage**

- Mold, mildew, smoke or musty odor, water damage, stains, etc.

A piece meeting one or more of these criteria is flagged with a 4-by-1 1-inch streamer that will accompany the piece throughout the process. This two-sided streamer is divided into three parts. In part 1, the referring staff member indicates a name, division or room number, and date to show when and where the piece went into the poor condition (PC) flow. Staff then check off one or more of the four stated criteria for referral or list reasons in an "other" option. Pieces are then charged on LCS, the OSU Libraries' online catalog and circulation control system, to the Preservation Office/ PC flow identification code. All orders and most other incoming materials are on LCS, usually entered by tape load via Innovacq, the online acquisition system. Pieces for which no electronic records exist can either be added to LCS via Innovacq or processed as manual, i.e., "no record" items. To avoid duplication of handling, staff can indicate where the piece should go after treatment if it does not need to be returned to the referring staff member. A common flow would be referral in the Receiving Acquisition Division, treatment by Collection Maintenance, and forwarding to the Search Section before shipment to Copy Cataloging.

## **2. Treatment**

At this time, mass deacidification is not an option for materials entering the OSUL system. Currently all referred materials go to Collection Maintenance for evaluation and possible treatment that may include repair, in-house binding, recommendation to bind commercially after cataloging, or to place the piece in a protective box. In point 2 of the poor condition streamer, Collection Maintenance staff indicate their evaluation and treatment of the piece, charge the piece to the "forwarding address" code, and send it back into the processing flow. If the Collection Maintenance staff recommends that the piece not be added to the collections in its present state the piece is charged to a different code and forwarded to the Monograph Acquisition Division with an explanation of why it should not be added.

## **3. Selector Review**

Part 3, the verso of the poor condition streamer, refers the piece back to the librarian who originally selected it for her or his location. These titles are displayed in the review shelf area

where approval titles, gifts, unindicated duplicates and other pieces await selector decisions. The selector who ordered the piece or titles in that subject area is noted on the streamer. Pieces are then displayed in the Acquisition Department by location/selector. Large collections are sometimes reviewed on book trucks in another area of technical services. Selectors are given the reasons why the piece cannot be added to the collection in its present format. It should be remembered that all materials requiring only repair or binding have already been removed and treated without needing selector review. This remaining group usually suffers from severe environmental damage or brittle paper.

Selectors have several choices. First, if the text is not considered valuable enough to warrant the cost of further treatment, the decision may be to discard it. This could occur with a mildewed gift title or a water damaged added edition or duplicate title. If the content of the piece is deemed important for the collection, the selector must decide on a replacement format. Selectors are asked to give first and second choices so that Acquisition Department staff do not delay processing titles if one option is not available. To try to obtain the text in any available published edition, reprint or microformat edition, selectors must indicate which of their funds is to be used. If the title is not available in published form, staff request copyright clearance, if appropriate, to photocopy or microform the damaged text in-hand or to obtain a complete copy of the text through interlibrary loan. Again, the selector must indicate the fund which will cover the cost of this procedure.

If the selector makes a replacement choice, the piece and streamer are forwarded to the Bibliographic Search Section to be processed as any other incoming order request, except that in this case, the damaged original will be discarded when a replacement format is received. A note to this effect is added to Innovacq and all other records for the piece are deleted from LCS. Selectors are also given a place for notes that may include options such as photocopying the text but removing and encapsulating the original illustrations or buying a replacement edition but retaining the damaged original in a box due to its value as an artifact. Selectors may discuss Collection Maintenance decisions with the Preservation Officer or Collection Maintenance staff. If the selector's decision is to discard the piece, the piece can then be reviewed for use by the Gift & Exchange Section or for possible inclusion in a future Friends of the Libraries book sale. More often, a title not acquired is too damaged for either of these purposes.

## **IMPLEMENTING THE PROCEDURE**

The poor condition procedure was implemented in November 1987. All technical services staff were required to attend an instructional workshop covering the identification and correct procedural flow for poor condition pieces. Three such workshops were offered for scheduling convenience. Examples of poor condition items and forms were shown and staff were given the opportunity to make additional suggestions and ask questions. To date, initial staff response to the procedure has been positive.

It is hoped that the long-term outcome of this procedure will be twofold. First, to slow or even halt the addition of physically problematic pieces to a collection one fourth of which is already in need of preservation treatment. The second goal is to alert selectors to the long-term fiscal commitment implicit in their collection development decisions regarding acceptance of some gifts and purchase of many older titles.

Three financial considerations can be seen in this procedure. If preservation problems are not identified and treated upon receipt, they will have to be identified and treated later, at a

greater cost. It is labor intensive to remove materials from existing flows for the purpose of preservation evaluation and treatment. There is a very real cost involved in the decision to acquire and treat, acquire and reformat, or acquire and discard physically problematic materials. This has been emphasized for selectors in the requirement to assign a fund for any request to reformat or replace a piece. Selectors are literally being asked if the text of the piece they are evaluating in-hand for preservation treatment is as, or more, important than other current imprints or out-of-print titles that they may wish to purchase with the same limited funds. This growing awareness may be the greatest long-term benefit of this procedure.

## **SUMMARY**

In summary, faculty and staff in technical services areas identified the need for a procedure to slow the addition of physically problematic materials to the OSUL collections. Development, implementation, and training for the procedure and form were possible due to the high level of commitment to preservation, detailed procedural knowledge, and thoughtful comments and input throughout the process on the part of study group members representing the acquisition, cataloging, and preservation operations as well as to strong administrative support. The decision to make identification and referral the responsibility of all technical services personnel meant a lot of training was necessary but it is expected to produce a greater systemwide commitment to preservation of the collections. The procedure and flow will be re-evaluated after more information, especially on volume of materials handled and cost of reformatting or replacement of texts, is available.

## **REFERENCES**

1. "Preserving the Ohio State University Libraries' Collections: The OSUL Preserving Planning Program" (Columbus: OSU, Sept. 1986), p.3-4.
2. The author and a student reviewed 55,000 Innovacq online acquisition system records, excluding approval titles, reflecting activity over a twenty-month period. Of these, approximately 26,300 had been received. Receipt was considered important as a final verification of whether the title ordered was an original 1870 edition, for example, modern reprint, or microformat edition. The former would be considered a potential preservation problem; the latter would not.